National Weather Service

Tallahassee, FL

Winter/Dry-season Outlook

Forecasts becoming more certain of a drier than normal winter over the region, which would increase drought conditions.

Oct. 21, 2010. The National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center has released the winter-season forecast for the country, which places most of our region under dry and mild conditions through February 2011. This is primarily due to a moderate to strong La Niña. La Niña is a cooling of the waters across the Equatorial Pacific Ocean and impacts weather across North America by diverting the polar jet stream northward, which also favors higher pressure and drier conditions over the Southeast. This is in direct contrast to last year when we were in the midst of a strong El Niño, which is a warming of the Pacific Ocean along the equator and favors a southward shift of the polar jet and a wetter, cooler winter across the region. Although La Niña is the opposite of El Niño, it also has the potential to bring weather extremes to parts of the nation, including the Southeast. The most likely scenario is for increasing drought conditions across the region, and the forecasts place a relatively high level of confidence (>50%) for below normal precipitation directly across our area. In addition, we are included within a >33% chance of seeing above normal temperatures from November into February (see below).

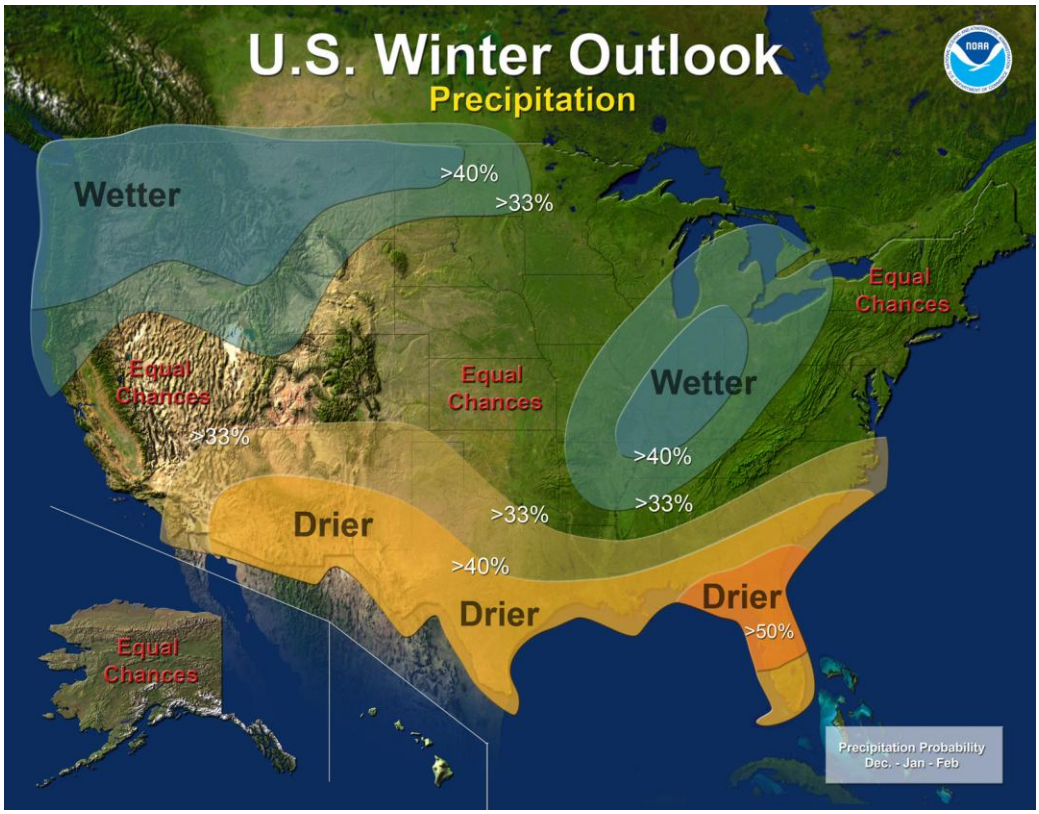
Much of the region, especially the northwestern Florida panhandle and southeast Alabama are already under severe to extreme drought conditions, with much of

southern Georgia also under moderate drought (see below, or http://www.drought.unl.edu/dm/DM_southeast.htm - This site is updated weekly.) The relatively high level of confidence in a drier than normal winter indicates we should see an expansion of drought conditions across most of Florida over the coming weeks. Thus, water management and an increase in wildfires could become more problematic over the region through the winter and into the spring (see below).

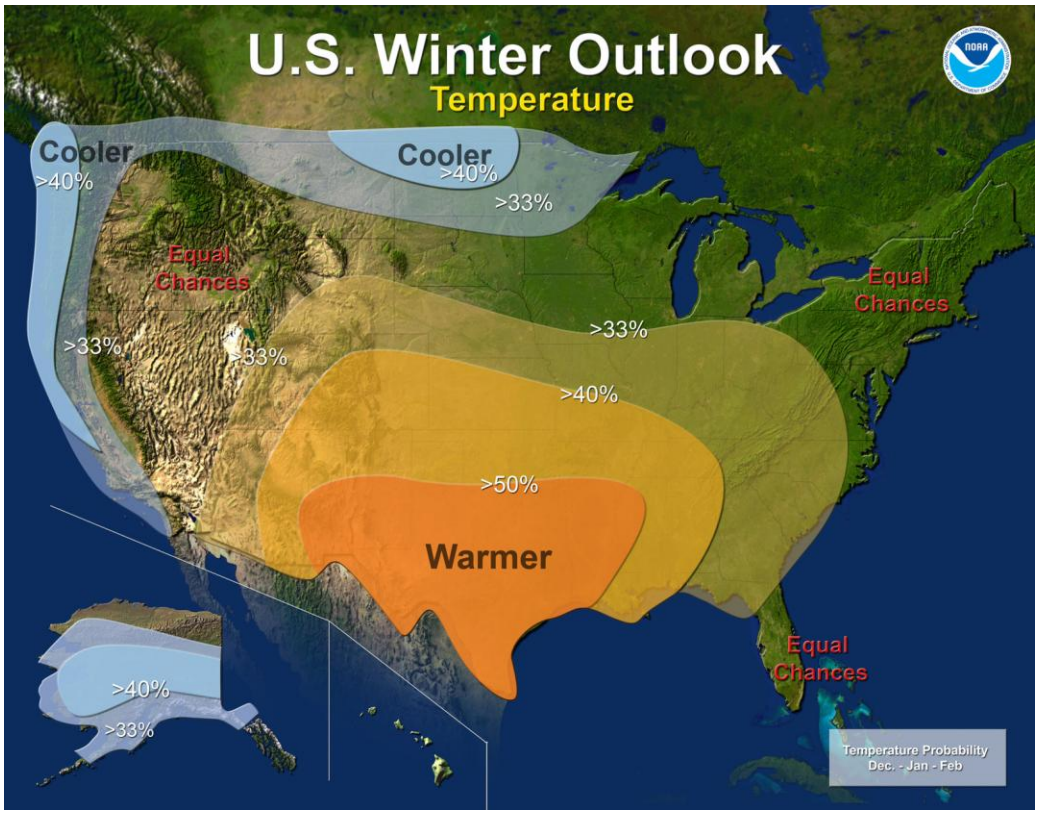
Seasonal outlooks are not capable of specific daily forecasts, as other factors are important in determining our day to day weather, such as the timing of upper air disturbances, cold front movements, etc… In addition other oceanic circulations which may impact our climate and weather, such as the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), are difficult to predict more than a week or so in advance. This places some uncertainty in the seasonal forecast, and we want to emphasize that seasonal forecasts do not preclude impacts from strong storm systems, including the potentials for an arctic outbreak or severe thunderstorm events this winter. However, on the whole, it is becoming more likely that this winter will be quite dry and possibly warmer than normal.

If you have any questions regarding the seasonal outlooks, please give our office a call at 850-942-8833 or 800-598-4562. You can also find us on the web at http://www.srh.noaa.gov/tae/ or follow the latest guidance from the CPC at http://www.cpc.noaa.gov/. A local study focusing on El Niño, also showing some impacts of La Niña, can be found at our website here: http://www.srh.noaa.gov/tae/?n=enso.

Other resources on La Niña:
http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/lanina.html ,
http://www.elnino.noaa.gov/lanina_new_faq.html,
http://www.cpc.noaa.gov/products/precip/CWlink/MJO/enso.shtml.



CPC forecast of precipitation probability above or below normal for Dec-Jan-Feb.



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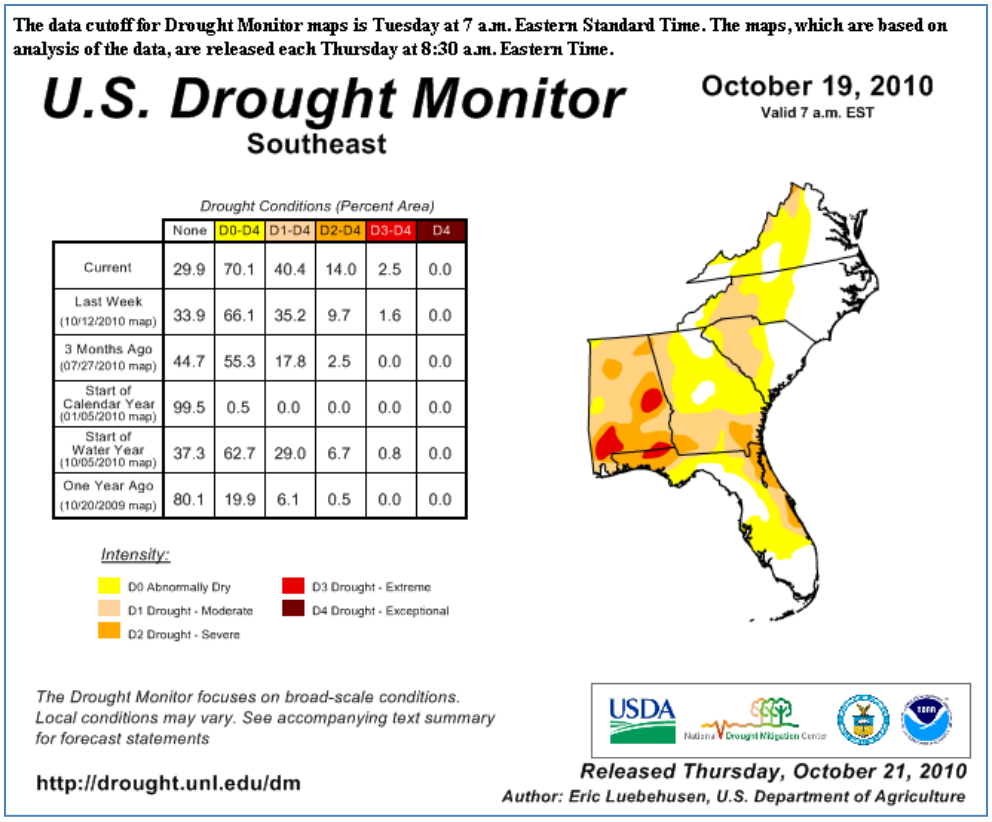
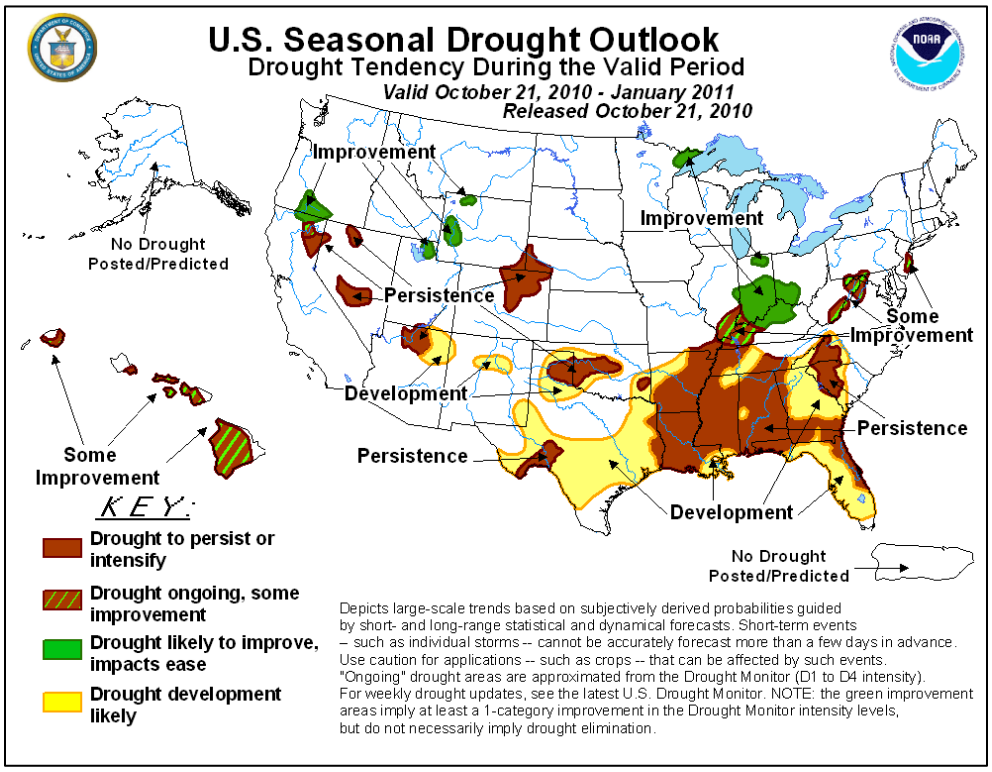


Current drought conditions through Oct. 19.



National drought outlook through Jan. 2011